

# When Lee's Men

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## Failed to Fight

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AS FAR AS West Virginia of 1861 was concerned — General Robert E. Lee "should have stood home."

This month is Virginia Heritage Month, and Old Dominion observances begin with the 150th anniversary of the birth of Robert E. Lee. Some of this fervor is leaking into the Mountain State.

The Allegheny foothills were Lee's Mecca, reminiscent of Napoleon's defeat and disaster at the prime of his career. But it brought the graying Southern commander a firsthand look at a war that was to bring both disaster and triumph to his standard career.

First, it exploded the myth that "a Southerner can lick ten Yankees." Here Lee saw his own soldiers loose and retreat against orders to charge. He learned that as he glared west out of war when soldiers began to desert and slip over the hill into the shadowed jungles.

Next, the wars of West Virginia drew Lee as might into the future as two of his lieutenants, Maj. John Washington and Col. D. S. Garrett, were killed. To this early start at the war, there were the most important deaths in either side of any American's presidency before and a member of the Southern general staff. And as the same Gen. Lee comprehended death with soldiers at his own army

who refused—or were reluctant—to obey official orders.

And General Lee got an insight into the culture of the mountain men who made up a large part of the Army of Northern Virginia. It is probably that such rough schooling in West Virginia gave Lee the experience that was to make him one of the most understanding and capable officers who have ever strode this continent.

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GEN. ROBERT E. LEE came to West Virginia from Staunton, Va., having ridden the railroad that ran toward the mountains where he had been sent to stop the tide of Northern invasion. Lee looked forward to the venture because his own son, Major Rooney Lee, was stationed here. Brig. Gen. R. S. Garnett had been sent to hold the Northerners from further advances, and Lee heard the news that the rebel armies in the hills were retreating—that they had abandoned Grafton, opening the route to conquest of that entire area by the Yankees.

Lee first arrived in Huntersville, Pocahontas County, where he inspected a temporary hospital full of smallpox and measles victims. The roads were poor, and many of the people were hostile to the Confederates—not from particular Northern sympathies, but because of native Anglo-Saxon suspicion of any stranger. They were the people who had dropped off the first wagon, and exploring parties when this country was settled. There were few slaves here, and most of the people reeked a living from small farms.

THE FEDERALS held Cheat Mountain, sprawling their troops along the sides of the Greenbrier River. Gen. W. W. Loring, in command at Huntersville, was stalling and reluctant to make an attack as the enemy kept building stronger fortifications. Loring's timidity was losing the campaign at this point. Lee utterly failed in an attempt to urge the timid general into action, and he went on to Valley Mountain. Loring had shown no inclination to obey Lee, although was his superior. It was Lee's first experience with a disobedient general officer. He was learning.

The rains were making war more terrible here in the hills. Soldiers wrote home that the mud was so deep that mules "sank up to their ears" along the crooked dirt roads.

A few days later Lee had mapped out a plan to take Cheat Mountain. "A battle must come off, and I am anxious to begin it," he wrote home. Col. Albert Rust of Arkansas had asked that he be allowed to lead the column which was first to attack the obnoxious. The plan was to take Cheat Mountain and clear Tygart's Valley. For some strange reason, Rust completely froze when his order came, and he refused to make the attack he had insisted be his privilege. This threw the entire plan out of order. All the other officers were sullen and defiant of Lee's orders to get into the fight—and the battle plan completely flubbed as it was born. Lee might as well have been a drummer boy for all the authority he commanded that day.

LEE WROTE HOME: "I can not tell you my regret and frustration at the downward events that caused the failure of the plan. I had taken away privileges to ensure success and avoided an it. But the spirit of the Almighty smiled otherwise. We are no worse off now than before."

He wore Gys, Lattier of the  
 of his troubles with the  
 weather and his affairs. But he  
 added "please do not speak of  
 it; we must try again."

In Richmond, later, the battle plan was examined and every staff officer agreed that his would easily have taken them prisoner. If his officers had remained. And it was later revealed that Col. Russell's intelligence was so frightened him with tales that there were alone 4,000 men lined up against him. General reports show that Ross and 2,000 men, and the enemy had but 200 this day. It would have been only 10 minutes had his severity of the Confederacy had put in its employed and the great upturn were not yet in the making.

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**WITH A HEAVY HEART,** Lee now went to South Mountain in Fayette County, where Jim, John B. Floyd was camped. The most important thing Lee did here was start his fabulous white beard. Prior to this time Lee had worn only a moustache. Actually, it all began because he lost his rain-

At Sewell, Lee was again disappointed. His efforts were squelched among themselves his children. He told one informant, as he crossed the door for look at information: "This is no keep- ing with everything else I have."

here—be order to understand  
needs know what things to  
to the community to help  
and and are not sure  
on this will be

Meanwhile, the Yankees with five victories during the 1976 Continental season. The nation of West Virginia has 100,000 votes cast in the President's favor to be won back. It was the first time since 1964 that the Yankees had won the state. The Yankees would be able to elect a President and Secretary of State in 1980 and 1984, respectively, to the President's advantage in 1980 and 1984.

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**LEE WAS HAPPY** to go back to Washington, and when he left his last job at the National Personnel Museum, Chief Lee returned to Woodbridge, Va. He never took anything like heavy weight of duty, and responsibility for the people he served. He was never a leader, but he was a good man, and he was a good man.

But Lee would not count on his severely wounded and disoriented staff. Even while the Governor of South Carolina is too ill to get on his feet, Lee must be able to move without depending on him," Davis wrote. "But he was unwilling to offend any one who was wearing a sword and sticking a lance for the Commonwealth."

There were better days ahead. Lee's bust is in the Hall of Fame today, but after the mountain campaign in West Virginia they were calling him "a shabby pretence," a "historic name," and "Granny Lee."

He didn't have much fun in  
West Virginia.

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